



Isa Lake Bridge Reconstruction

Project Scoping

July 2012

Dear Interested Party:

Yellowstone National Park is in the process of developing a plan to reconstruct the Isa Lake Bridge in its existing location at Craig Pass within Yellowstone National Park. Located at the continental divide the timber bridge spans Isa Lake and serves the road connecting Old Faithful and West Thumb.

Reconstruction of the current bridge is proposed to address the deteriorated condition of the timber bridge that was constructed in 1942. The historic bridge, a contributing feature of the Grand Loop Road Historic District, has several structural flaws that cause severe deflection when used by heavy loads. A September 2010 bridge inspection report, prepared by the Federal Highway Administration, determined the existing bridge is in poor condition, and recommended replacement.

Proposed elements of this plan include:

- Improve the bridge to excellent condition for the long-term by replacing the bridge piers, abutments, rails and deck with materials to maintain the historic appearance of the existing bridge. Repave the existing parking area and pullout.*
- Improve safety by decreasing the speed limit in this popular pedestrian area.*
- Maintain the existing lake shore with no alterations, and no changes to existing hydrology of the lake.*
- Increase the vehicular load capacity for the bridge by using engineered girders rather than logs. This would increase the finished elevation by about 3 feet.*
- Maintain visitor access on the road connecting Old Faithful and West Thumb.*

An Environmental Assessment will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that, 1) explores a reasonable range of alternatives to meet the project objectives; 2) evaluates potential issues and impacts to park resources and values; 3) and identifies mitigation measures to lessen the degree or extent of these impacts.

The National Park Service encourages public participation throughout the NEPA process during which the public has two opportunities to formally comment on the project, once during initial project scoping and again following release of the Plan/EA. The National Park Service is currently in the scoping phase of this project and invites you to voice your ideas, comments, or concerns about this proposed action. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA. Your interest and participation is appreciated.

Sincerely,

*Daniel N. Wenk
Superintendent
Yellowstone National Park*

Preliminary Alternatives

Following is the preliminary range of alternatives to be evaluated in the environmental assessment:

- **No-Action Alternative:** Under this alternative, the Isa Lake Bridge would not be reconstructed. Issues related to the aging of the existing bridge would not be addressed. The National Park Service would still complete short-term and periodic minor repairs and/or improvement activities for continued operation of the bridge, such as patching, rail maintenance, and repair of the deck. Deterioration of the bridge's structural elements would continue until safety concerns would eventually cause the closure of the bridge.
- **Proposed Action Alternative:** Under this alternative, the existing Isa Lake Bridge would be removed and reconstructed with a bridge of similar appearance. The reconstructed bridge would be designed to retain the historic character of the existing bridge in accordance with the Secretary of Interior's Standards on Historic Preservation. The bridge would be on the same alignment, though due to taller girders, the bridge would be approximately 3 feet higher in grade. The approach road on each end of the bridge would be raised to meet the elevation of the new bridge. The new bridge would have a driving surface that is 30 feet wide. During bridge reconstruction, the road would remain open via a temporary bridge spanning Isa Lake to the north of the existing bridge. The existing parking area and pullout would be repaved.

Overview of the Process

Project milestones include ("*" indicates opportunities for public comment):

- Public scoping (closes August 24, 2012)*
- Preparation of the Environmental Assessment (Summer 2012)
- Public review of the Environmental Assessment (Fall 2012)*
- Analysis of public comment (Fall 2012)
- Preparation of decision document (Fall 2012)
- Announcement of decision (Early Winter 2012)

Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

- Water Resources and Wetlands
- Geology and Soils
- Vegetation including Rare Plants
- Historic Structures
- Visitor Use and Experience



Existing Bridge over Isa Lake

Ideas to Consider

Below are a few ideas to keep in mind as you develop your comments on this proposal:

1. Are there any issues/concerns about the project that you think we should consider?
2. Are there any other alternatives that you think should be considered?
3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the environmental assessment?

How Do I Comment on This Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment (PEPC) website:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/yell>

Comments may also be hand-delivered to the park's headquarters in Mammoth Hot Springs, Wyoming, or mailed to:

Isa Lake Bridge Reconstruction
Attn: Resource Compliance Office
Yellowstone National Park
P.O. Box 168
Yellowstone National Park, WY 82190

Please provide all comments by August 24, 2012.